COMMANDERS DIGEST

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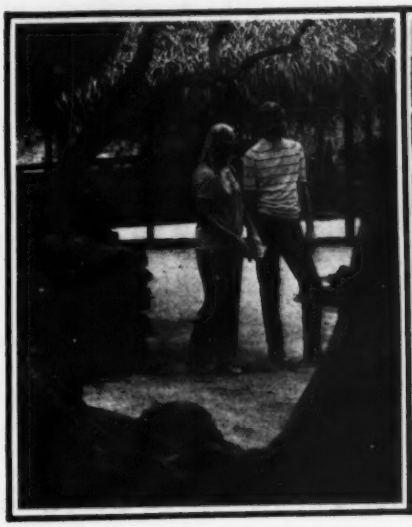
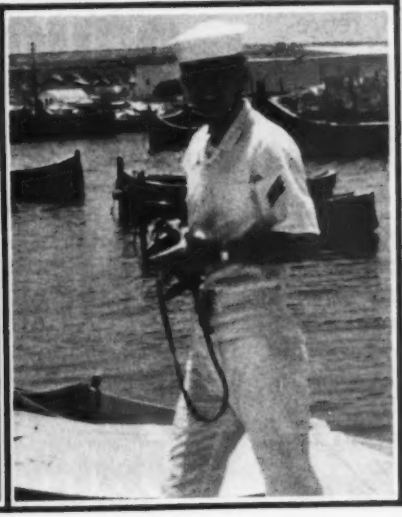
# MILITARY LEAVE & LIBERTY





The Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) has for the first time established comprehensive policy guidance on leave and liberty or pass. It is designed to eliminate the loss of leave experienced each year by many Service members, and to significantly increase the use of earned leave.

The key to this new program is the determination that a leave program is a military requirement of equal importance with other military requirements and the clear assignment of responsibility to DoD and Service headquarters and high levels of command that they must not assign nonoperational tasks which would interfere with leave programs unless they cancel or suspend other nonoperational requirements.

The OSD policies were established as a result of the identification of several large problems associated with the annual leave entitlements of military personnel:

- People have, on the average, very high leave balances, and do not take nearly the 30 days' leave each year to which the law entitles them.
- Service personnel lose 2 to 10 days of leave a year. At current pay scales, this has an overall value in excess of $36 million.
- Annually payments for unused leave to military personnel leaving active duty are above $400 million, representing enormous amounts of leave not taken.
- Widely varying Service policies and practices regarding leave and liberty, or pass, in similar circumstances.

The new OSD policies explicitly recognize that vacations and short periods of rest from the work environment are essential to maintaining maximum effectiveness, high motivation, and morale. The lack of such respite adversely affects performance and ultimately health, and exacerbates the effects of separation from home and family. Further, it also adversely influences the attitudes of the

family, which, in turn, influence the career plans of the Service member. These considerations are of particular importance to those in career service.

For these reasons the policy states "Operational functions and essential supporting functions of each command in the Armed Forces must be accomplished to the extent permitted by the manning provided. Full manning is designed to provide a full capability to do so under wartime conditions. At the same time, it is the responsibility of command in expending effort on assigned tasks, and particularly of higher command in assigning those tasks, to keep in mind all reductions below full manning currently in effect.

"All officers in command, major headquarters, and the Military Departments shall ensure that secondary and nonessential efforts, which would work to prevent execution of an aggressive leave program, though they may be desirable in themselves, are: (1) not

# NEW DoD POLICY IMPROVES LEAVE, LIBERTY PROGRAMS

imposed (2) coupled with matching reductions in less important programs, or (3) suspended."

The key to successful results from these leave policies are the officers in command, particularly those in higher command levels, in major headquarters and at the military departmental levels.

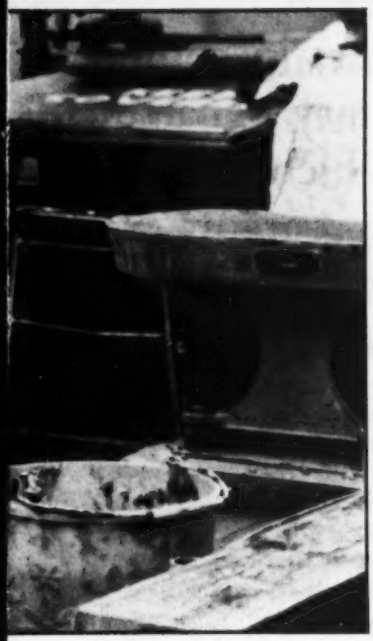
The new directive requires that "officers authorized to grant leave shall establish and regulate schedules to provide for maximum use of earned leave consistent with operational and training workloads, the maintenance of the required degree of operational readiness, and the desires of the individual Service members. All personnel shall be provided the time to take leave annually in these programs."

It goes on to require that "officers shall encourage and assist all members to use, on the average, their entire 30 days leave each year. The Congress has provided compensation for members who were not able to use their leave because military requirements have prevented it, and personel should not be required to expend leave immediately prior to separation simply for the purpose of reducing leave balances. On the other hand, use of the leave system as an extra money program, either as a method of compensation or as a career continuation incentive, defeats the intent of the Congress to provide for the health and welfare of Service personnel. It is, therefore, specifically intended that large leave balances shall not be accrued expressly for settlement upon separation or release from active duty."

In summary, the Secretary of Defense has found that an aggressive leave program is an essential military requirement, that persuasive pursuit of these policies at all levels will make a positive contribution to cost savings, to morale, level of performance and career motivation, and that the command and headquarters levels in the Military Departments are responsible for achieving these objectives.

Commanders are encouraged to allow their unit members frequent periods of leave throughout the year to pursue outside interests and also provide them the opportunity to take at least one longer leave period—about 14 days in length—for the big events like marriage, the new baby, or the annual vacation home.

The new leave and liberty policy recommends that commanders authorize not less than 30 days delay en route, to count as leave, during permanent change of stations whenever possible. The longer periods allow families to arrive in a new area, establish a household, and even sightsee together before the sponsor reports for duty. Those en route to and from unaccompanied tours should also be granted the minimum 30 day period to allow them time with their families.



# QUESTIONS about the new POLICY

Lieutenant General Leo E. Benade, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Personnel Policy, discussed the new policies on leave and liberty for the benefit of the individual Service member in a recent interview.

**COMMANDERS DIGEST:** General Benade, is it true that we will no longer be paid for accrued leave?

**GENERAL BENADE:** Absolutely not. There is nothing in the new directive or policy which changes the entitlement of payment for accrued leave. That is a matter of law and could only be changed by amending the law.

**CD:** What about this change, though, in the leave policy?

**GENERAL BENADE:** The changes were brought about by an attempt to strengthen and improve the leave program. We're trying, among other things, to avoid the large loss of leave that so many Service members experience every year. We're trying to change from a passive attitude of taking leave when it's possible, to a positive attitude of making it possible for people to take leave. We want to comply with the letter and spirit of the law, which is to encourage Service members to take leave for the respite that it gives them from the work environment, and for their mental and physical well being.

**CD:** What authority do local commanders have, in this case the supervisors? Will they be able to, say, to grant up to 60 days of leave to an individual?

**GENERAL BENADE:** They could. There's nothing in the proposed new directive which changes the existing authority of the commander. It does occur to me,

though, that if the Service member were to take leave beyond the leave that he has accumulated, for example, if he were to take another 30 days of advance leave, then if on top of that he were to be faced with an emergency situation which would require additional leave, he might very well wind up in a position from which he could not recover, in terms of getting even again with the board.

**CD:** Well, do you see a situation here where an individual might be forced to take leave?

**GENERAL BENADE:** There is no intention of forcing any individual to take leave. But there will be active encouragement for Service members to take leave for their physical and mental well being.

**CD:** Well, are there any provisions in this directive, now, so that a commander or supervisor can reflect this in an individual efficiency or evaluation report whereby he's not taking leave?

**GENERAL BENADE:** He could, but I woud visualize that to be the exception. If the individual does not take leave because of requirements of the unit, or mission accomplishment, certainly, there is no compulsion for the individual to take leave, or for his commander to seek to have him take leave.

But if, on the other hand, the motive for the Service member not taking leave is purely because the individual desires to accumulate the leave in order to be compensated in cash for the unused leave, that is clearly contrary to the law and contrary to the policy directives of the Department of Defense.

**"All officers in command, the Military departments efforts which . . . prevent leave programs are not matching reductions**

**CD:** But a person can still be—or will be paid for accrued leave?

**GENERAL BENADE:** Individuals will still be compensated for accrued leave in accordance with the existing rules of law, yes.

**CD:** There are reports of a General Accounting Office (GAO) review of leave policy whereby they want to really reduce the cost of the program; is that true?

**GENERAL BENADE:** Yes, there is a General Accounting Office study which is underway and, in fact, there are other

major headquarters and shall ensure that . . . the execution of aggressive imposed, coupled with . . . or suspended."

elements both in Congress and in the Executive Branch which are examining the leave program.

I think perhaps not too many people realize that the leave program is a very costly program. Each year it takes about $400 million to compensate Service members for leave that they have accumulated. There are many who feel that this simply reflects that our leave entitlements are excessive and overly liberal.

What we are seeking to do—and again I emphasize—is that I don't believe that the program of leave for the Armed Forces is excessive. I want to see it protected. I do not want to see it changed. The motive here is not saving money; it is to ensure that we are complying with the letter and spirit of the laws that give us this entitlement.

**CD:** General, there are those that are saying, however, as a result of this leave policy that this is another erosion of military benefits. Do you see it in that light?

**GENERAL BENADE:** Nothing could be further from the truth. It is not an erosion of a benefit; it is an attempt to safeguard the benefit.

I think we have to face the fact that many times Congress will provide an entitlement for members of the Armed Forces, and then over the years that entitlement is used in ways which were not intended. But because of the passage of time, members begin to regard it as "a right." I'm not quite clear, sometimes, on what people mean as "a right." I don't believe you can ever have a right to something which is outside the intent of the letter of the law that gives us the basic entitlement in the first place.

I appreciate that there are some Service members who would feel that this is an erosion, but I think they have an entirely wrong understanding of what the purpose of this program is.

**CD:** I wonder if you would summarize just briefly for us, then, the provisions of this new program.

**GENERAL BENADE:** The essential elements of the program are simply to

A brief respite from the work environment, periodically, throughout the year is necessary for the individual's mental and physical well being.

make every effort to ensure that Service members are afforded the opportunity to take their full leave—30 days, on the average—each year. We want to encourage commanders to actively plan for members of their units to take leave. We're trying to avoid the loss of leave, especially leave for which there is no compensation once they get beyond the 60 days maximum that is permitted by law.

For Service members who are making changes of station between the Continental United States and overseas, or from overseas to the United States, and to and from assignments in the fleet, for the Navy, we want to provide as a matter of routine procedure that they will have 30 days of leave each year in connection with their change of station.

For those who are members of units where they are seriously undermanned and have not been able to take their leave while they were members of an undermanned unit, we want to provide that they will receive 30 days of leave upon a change of station.

Now, this is going to add some difficulties. It will add to what we call the "transient account," which are man-days lost in terms of productivity to a unit. So we have to pay a price on that side. But we think the well being of the military members and their families, in the case of those who have dependents, is the overriding consideration in this case.

Now, I want to emphasize again, there is no proposal to change the law. The law itself provides 30 days of leave a year, and provides up to 60 days of leave which may be settled for in cash, will not be changed. At least, that is not our desire.

Again I would repeat, though, that the leave program is a very costly program. And understandably, with the high cost of manpower, all of these areas are being scrutinized. And it's in our own best interest to use this program properly for the purposes for which Congress intended it.

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